
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	471 M Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	2C	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2011	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#11-474	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner John Lippman, seeks review for a one-story addition on top of a two-story, four-unit residential building at 471 M Street NW in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. Plans were prepared by Studio: Crowley Hall, PLLC.

Property Description and Context

The 2-story, brick building at 471 M Street was built in 1937 by the Washington Housing Corporation as a four-family apartment building. It was designed by Romulus C. Archer, Jr. one of the first African-American registered architects in the District of Columbia. This partnership designed and built several similar projects across all sections of the District intended to provide affordable housing for working people. 471 M Street is characteristic of the housing type, and though simple, exemplifies a time period when affordable housing for working class people was a national emergency. The construction is spartan and economical with little ornament. The cast-stone door surround is the only surviving ornament, with the original metal cornice—which was originally at the base of the parapet--now missing. Brickwork is common bond with soldier course headers at the windows. Even the placement of the primary entrance at grade is a form of economy that eliminated a superfluous formal entry steps or porch. While architecturally modest, it was built within the period of significance of the Mount Vernon Square Historic District (1845-1945) and contributes to its character as a working class residential neighborhood.

Proposal

A one-story addition is proposed for the top of the building set flush with the front facade. The desired location of the addition is driven by the location of the building's vertical circulation in that an addition forward of the stairs would be bigger than an addition placed to the rear of the stairs. Cladding material of the approximately 10 foot tall addition would be smooth fiber cement panels. The addition would roof over the existing open court in the c-plan footprint of the existing structure. Alterations to the front entryway would increase the height of the door to bring it in line with the adjacent windows.

Evaluation and Recommendation

For additions, proposed work should be judged both for compatibility with the affected building and for its effect on the historic district. Historic properties may merit different levels of treatment or attention depending on their relative historic and architectural significance. For instance, greater flexibility would typically be given for alterations to an historic garage than for a prominent historic church. 471 M Street is inherently a modest building that does not have the architectural distinction or presence. Its

significance is not architectural, but is an historic and cultural marker that represents a period of history when African-American architects were starting to integrate into the ranks of professional architects, when the creation of new, sturdy, hygienic housing for the working poor was a public priority. This character survives in its efficient 2-story size and economical use of building materials. To fundamentally alter its form or over-ornament it would divorce it from this essential character and disassociate it from its history.

That is not to say an addition is not possible in another form. Considering its lack of architectural significance, a one-story addition on the rear of the roof could be compatible and allow the original form of the building to remain discernable. The addition would still be visible obliquely along M Street to the east through an adjacent vacate lot, but a setback of at least a 1:1 ratio (setback to height) would be sufficient to allow the building to read as a two-story building and achieve the applicant's programmatic goals. The Board approved a similar set back approach for a third floor addition to a similar modest apartment building in the 1200 block of 10th Street several years ago.

The alterations to the front entrance should also be removed from the design. Reconstructing the missing cornice at the parapet would be an appropriate way to add ornament in a historically sensitive way to front façade.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board direct the applicant to revise the design for a third floor addition that includes at least a 1:1 setback from the front elevation and return to the Board for further review when ready. The HPO further recommends that the design of the addition be clearly differentiated from the original building.